DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 047 587 FL 002 125

AUTHOR Savaiano, Eugene
TITLE Professionalism in the Teaching of Foreign Languages.
PUB DATE 5 Mar 71
NOTE 12p.; Speech presented at the Oklahoma State University Second Annual Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, Stillwater, Oklahoma, March 5, 1971

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Changing Attitudes, Cultural Education, Educational Attitudes, *Educational Change, Educational Interest, Elementary Schools, Instructional Program Divisions, *Language Instruction, *Modern Languages, Secondary Schools, Social Change, Summer Institutes, *Teacher Education, Teaching Assistants

ABSTRACT

Notions of professionalism, examined in this address, are introduced by a brief history of language instruction from the mid-1930's to the present. The author then comments on the role of the Naticnal Defense Education Act institutes, the relevance of language instruction, college teaching assistants, teacher preparation, post-graduate education, culture study, periodicals, and professional crganizations. Concluding remarks bear on the significance of change in the world of education. (RL)

ED047587

PROFESSIONALISM IN THE TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

(A Speech Presented to Prospective Teachers of Foreign Languages at the Oklahoma State University Second Annual Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages)

Carl Stokes, the Mayor of Cleveland, Ohio, spoke in Wichita last night and he told his audience that after returning from a trip to Europe, he was called upon many times to speak before various civic and professional clubs. On one occasion he asked the chairman of the club how long she wanted him to talk and she answered "Mr. Stokes, it's your job to talk and it's our job to listen. If we get through before you do, we'll let you know." So I hope that this evening if you get through before I do, you'll let me know.

It was in September of 1936 that I began my career as a teacher of foreign languages right here in the state of Oklahoma, at Sapulpa Junior College. I had just spent four full depression years in college preparing myself to be a teacher and during those days there were five or six candidates for every vacancy that occurred. Those were the years that have been referred to as "years of famine" for foreign language teachers--years when a first-year teacher could expect a starting salary of about $80 a month. Foreign languages were not high on any superintendent's priority list and many schools that had good foreign language departments found themselves forced to retrench and it was often the foreign language that was the first to go. Teachers of foreign languages who stayed on in many cases taught everything but foreign languages and those who had a foreign language to teach were continually asked to justify foreign languages as a part of their school's curriculum.

Since those days, 35 years ago, the teaching of foreign languages has had its ups and downs. In fact after World War II and Sputnik, we had our heyday with the help of the Modern Language Association of America and the support of many prominent men like Earl McGrath and James B. Conant, who publicly stressed the importance of

FL 002 125

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

foreign language study. We rose to even greater heights after 1958 when the government under the unprecedented NDEA paid teachers to study foreign languages and gave graduate students lucrative three-year fellowships to study for a doctorate in foreign languages. All this, of course, was designed to upgrade the teaching of foreign languages in the elementary and secondary schools of the United States. There was hardly a school in the United States that didn't introduce foreign language study into its curriculum. To meet the teacher shortage almost every teacher of almost anything who had a few hours of a foreign language on a transcript was converted into a foreign language teacher. In many cases this proved to be unsatisfactory. However, some of these teachers continue today as very successful teachers of foreign languages. The only thing that kept many schools from introducing a foreign language was a scarcity of teachers. To add to the glamour of it all, our government helped finance the purchase of expensive electronic equipment for high school foreign language departments and students flocked to foreign language courses to play with gadgetry which their teachers were never taught to use properly, and which, in many cases, their teachers actually feared. Although many teachers did learn to use this equipment effectively, much of it now lies idle in what was once known as the language laboratory. Those were days too when many teachers felt that we would soon be replaced by machines. Besides the profusion of electronic laboratory equipment that was appearing on the market, we were being threatened by translating machines. I do not know the status of these machines today, but they had some rough going for a while. The Russians were quite upset at one point when a very important document appeared with the translation, "The Vodka is all right, but the meat is spoiled." Since this was completely out of context, they checked the original only to find "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." The Germans had a similiar problem when the word "water-goat" came out as a translation for "hydraulic ram." I might add that I tell this only for you of the young generation for it is very likely that

your teachers heard it years ago.

As the past director of eight government NDEA institutes held on the campus of Wichita State University and in Puebla, Mexico, I do not want to give the impression that I am being critical of the teacher training efforts of the National Defense Education Act. It was because I was able to experience at first hand just how effective these institutes were in helping our approximately 400 teachers and prospective teachers become better teachers that I continued year after year to direct one. But, I feel that this whole upsurge in interest in foreign language study that occurred during the institute years caused foreign language enrollments to reach such great heights that only a miracle could keep them there. It should be no surprise to any of us if there now seems to be a decline. For as could be expected, we have not been able to maintain this more or less pseudo-peak and consequently, the trend during recent years has been a sagging foreign language enrollment in some public schools, the dropping of the foreign language requirement in some colleges and universities, a lack of interest among many students in the study of foreign languages and a questioning of the value of foreign language study by some educators. Many of these feel that we foreign language teachers failed to take advantage of our golden opportunity, that we taught foreign languages poorly, and that even with all the government financing we failed to prepare teachers who could make language learning relevant to this generation of students. So we have reached the time when we again must justify the teaching of our discipline at all levels--just as we of the 1936 generation had to justify it.

We teachers of foreign languages have survived many crises and if another should develop, I think that we'll survive it also. I say "if another should develop" because I really don't feel as pessimistic about the present situation as many of my colleagues do. In the first place, I know of many cities where neither the public schools nor the university foreign language enrollment has significantly declined. I know of some

universities, my own a good example, where the foreign language requirement for a degree in Liberal Arts, is not being threatened. It may be someday, but it isn't yet. In the second place, I want to point out that the same people who today challenge the importance of foreign language study are challenging the importance of the study of everything which in their opinion has no <u>immediate</u> relevance. The attack is not on foreign languages alone, but on all subjects that require a high degree of discipline on the part of the student.

As I implied before, our recent golden age of high language enrollments gave many foreign language teachers, especially in the colleges, a false sense of security. I have seen university foreign language professors so smug in their job that they can't give a minute's time to their student's language learning problems--so busy with their research and book-writing that they can't take time to be a professional, whose chief interest should be to further the learning and teaching of foreign languages. Some of them feel that if it weren't for their students they could get something done. These same professors consider the teaching of elementary language not to be their cup of tea, so they have turned this sensitive job over to what we call TA's or teaching assistants. Most of these have just completed a B.A. degree and many were not even in teacher education courses as undergraduates. Since many are given complete control of a class and are research-oriented scholars who are seeking a Ph.D. in literature or linguistics, during their teaching assistant years they are neither teachers interested in first-year students nor assistants. Their chief aim is the advanced degree. In some universities they number over 100 in the foreign language department and in some cases are left to their own devices with little if any guidance. It's no wonder that some college students have rebelled against the foreign language requirement. I have also seen high school teachers of foreign languages too self-satisfied to attend even a local meeting of their language association, to say nothing of regional, state, or national meetings. They too have

no time for professionalism, no time for involvement in what's going on in the profession--no time nor interest in furthering the learning and teaching of foreign languages. Some don't even indulge in self improvement by continued study or travel abroad. I have seen chapters of the AATSP become inactive because no one is willing to devote what time it takes to keep the chapter active. This has happened recently in Kansas, when one of our chapters with many years of valuable service to teachers of Spanish was allowed to die on the vine. Oklahoma's own Chalmers Hermann was a product of that chapter and so was I. There are some states without a chapter of a professional foreign language teacher's organization because no one will take the time to organize one. As Secretary-Treasurer of the AATSP, I have received several letters lately from foreign language teachers whose foreign language requirement is in jeopardy. They encourage our office to come to their rescue. They feel that the national office must do something about <u>their</u> declining enrollments and <u>their</u> problem with an administration that threatens <u>their</u> foreign language requirement. It is up to us, they say, to save <u>their</u> profession. It is important for us to keep in mind that as the universities give up their entrance and graduation foreign language requirements, the public schools in the surrounding areas will notice a decrease in foreign language enrollment.

Certainly by now all of you prospective teachers of a foreign language must have a pretty good idea of what I mean by professionalism and why I have entitled this talk "Professionalism in the Teaching of Foreign Languages." Even more than the prospective teacher of English, math, and the social sciences, you will find professionalism to play a very important role in your future careers. They are not likely to have to justify their discipline; you, however, will be called upon time and time again to justify yours. Your challenge is a great one and at the same time an exciting one. No other discipline offers what yours has to offer: the opportunity to uncover a whole new culture through communication in a common language with peoples whose

language is different from yours. Unfortunately, not everyone agrees that uncovering this new culture is of great significance and that is why you must be made aware of the fact that you will have a double responsibility when you become a teacher. Being a good professional as well as a well-prepared teacher, you will enter your profession with a double thrust: one directed toward teaching your students, and the other toward promoting your profession. Only by being teacher-professionals will you be able to make a contribution toward maintaining or improving the status quo of the foreign language teaching profession. My answer to these teachers who think the national office should do something about their sagging enrollments is that it is the responsibility of the teachers themselves to do a better job of teaching in the classroom. Only then will students want to study their subject.

By the time you graduate, you will all have studied some 30 to 35 semester hours of a foreign language and you will have had the professional education courses required by your State Department of Public Instruction to permit you to teach in the public schools. Hopefully, you will be qualified teachers of the foreign language which you have prepared to teach. You can enter the profession with one of two attitudes: you can be self-satisfied, do nothing but teach your classes, draw your pay check, and live it up. Or you can enter the profession aware of the great challenge before you, wanting to become a good teacher and at the same time to take an active part in promoting your profession. If you are interested in this second alternative, here are some things I think you will need to do.

You will always bear in mind that as teachers in the 1970's you are to deal with a generation of students who are living in a world where change is taking place at a staggering rate of speed. It is a generation of students who feel keenly that everything they study must have immediate relevance when they finish their university education. For that small percentage of your students who have already decided on a career that will require a knowledge of a foreign language (teaching, business,

international relations, interpreter, social worker, etc.), relevance will be no problem. Then there will be those few who will be interested in foreign languages just because they like foreign languages. The only motivation they will need is good teaching. Your problem will be to make the study of your language relevant for the great majority who take a foreign language only because it is required to get in and out of college. How will you make foreign language study seem of immediate relevance to them? This of course is a subject for a whole book. But I would like to give a hint or two which might stimulate you to do some reading and thinking about the matter.

In the first place, you will realize that few prospective teachers become fluent speakers of a foreign language after four years of classwork in college classrooms in the U. S. Like many language majors just out of school, some of you will feel so uncertain of yourselves that you will be afraid to converse in your foreign language with a native speaker. Regardless of your state of preparation, you will want to make it your first concern to go as soon as possible to a country where your language is spoken natively: Mexico, Spain, South America for Spanish; French Canada or France for French, Germany for German, Russia for Russian, and Italyfor Roman culture. You will enroll in a six-or eight-week course and will ask the director of your school to guarantee you a home-stay with a family (not in a boarding house) and opportunities as part of your course work to spend a period of time each day with native residents who will converse with you and help you know their culture. It is not easy for Americans to receive invitations to a private home in most foreign countries. I have known teachers to spend several months in Spain and never be invited by a family to enter its home. In our institutes, we brought Mexicans of all walks of life to our participants as conversation leaders and escorts and in this way rapport was established from the very beginning with our Mexican hosts. By the end of our six-week stay in Puebla, most participants had been in several Mexican homes.

Now that the government institutes are over, our WSU Summer School in Puebla, Mexico is carrying on this tradition. I am in a position to tell you that foreign study can provide you with the confidence in speaking and on-the-spot cultural experiences which are indispensable to your becoming a first-rate teacher as well as a real professional. Your aim will be to perfect your own command of your foreign language so that you will speak it fluently and with a near-native accent. This will permit you to make your subject relevant by talking about the French, the Spanish, the Germans, the Russians, and their country from first-hand experience. When your students know that they have a teacher who has studied in the foreign country and is a good model to imitate, the foreign language will seem all the more relevant to them. To be able to say "I know, I was there" will give you confidence and will impress your students.

Secondly, you will enter the profession convinced that teaching a foreign language is a skill and that learning it is also a skill and that skills are acquired without undue pain only under the direction of skillful teachers. You will teach your students to understand, speak, read, and write the foreign language, in that order, and you will consider all four to be of equal importance from the very beginning. Long periods of audio-lingual drill without any knowledge of the written language have, in my opinion, doubtful pedagogical value for high school and university students. As a good professional, you will observe teaching demonstrations, like those you will see tomorrow morning, at meetings such as this one. You will read and see films about experimertation with new methods and materials, and you will soon find the method that works best for you and it may be one that won't work at all for anyone else. You will be prepared to change and adapt that method as you personally grow and change in a changing atmosphere.

Through first-hand observation during your study abroad, you will gain a cultural insight that will permit you to become a cultural anthropologist as well as a language teacher. You will teach your language and the culture it represents as though they

were one and the same -- one complementing the other. But first you will know well your own culture so that you can compare and contrast, bringing out the differences and the similarities which are found in today's culture, in the anthropological sense. In other words, you will teach your students to communicate with people of another country in their language and at the same time teach them the country's culture so that they will have an understanding of how the native speaker lives, thinks, and behaves. You will acquaint them with his way of life, his habits, ideas, and ideals. What the native speaker does because he was brought up that way is what should interest your students most. In many cases, the student who stops studying the language after a couple of years, and most will, will remember what he learned about the native speaker of the language and his culture long after he has forgotten the pattern drills and verb endings.

You will use your knowledge of linguistics to compare and contrast the foreign language which you are teaching with English. This will give your students an awareness of the nature of language in general and many of them will understand for the first time how their own language is put together - something which is difficult to achieve by studying only one's own language. The important thing here, as in culture, is to compare and to contrast the two languages.

In class and as part of your club activities, you will make use of foreign movies, slides, newspapers, magazines, tapes, radio, and native speakers of the language in the community. Many cultural materials are available to you for classroom work, such as the AATSP Cultural Units, prepared by Mrs. Savaiano, and distributed by the AATSP. You will encourage your students to go to nearby universities for plays, contests, and other activities related to the study of your foreign language. I'm sure that Oklahoma's fine universities provide the opportunities which we at Wichita State University provide our students and those in nearby communities. This year alone, we have had or will have had on our campus Moliere's Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme, performed by Le Tréteau de Paris, four one-act plays in Spanish, performed by students

and faculty of WSU, Gerhard Lessen, in the "One-penny Opera," Lilian Westphal in a drama recital, movies in Italian, French, German, and Spanish, a group of eight Argentinians presenting music and short theater productions, El Curro and his flamenco troup from San Antonio, and visiting scholars to speak in a foreign language on scholarly subjects. Most of these are free to you and your students and those of you who are alert and interested will make the effort to see that your students take advantage of such opportunities. You will encourage your students to travel and study in the country where the language is spoken natively.

You will consider it your obligation to belong to professional organizations related to your language and attend their meetings: local, regional, state, and even national. If you find them dull, you won't decide to stay home and let them go on being dull. You will pitch in and help make them meaningful. You will help chair meetings, become an officer, appear on programs. By reading language journals like Hispania, The French Review, The German Quarterly, The Modern Language Journal, Foreign Language Annals and The Classical Review you will keep abreast of the times and know what new texts are being published and what experimentation is going on in new methodology.

You will never stop studying your language. Like the physics and algebra that you studied and have never used since, your language will soon slip away from you. You will go for a masters and perhaps a Ph.D. Never forget that when teachers cease to be students they cease to be teachers. Four years are few to learn a foreign language and its culture well while studying some 92 semester hours of other courses, many of them completely unrelated to foreign languages. You will return to the country of your language again and again. I once had a French teacher at the University of Chicago who felt that he owed it to his students to return to France once a year in order to keep his accent authentic and his command of French accurate.

I mentioned awhile ago that you will be teaching in a changing world. I would like to conclude with some comments about this. I did much of my university studies

when the economic situation was much worse than anything we face today, and when I went out to teach I thought I had it made. My generation was aware of change, but we were not overly conscious of its impact. It was something which progressed at a scheduled, orderly pace and which could be easily controlled. In the intervening thirty-five years we have come full cycle in the teaching of language: from grammar-translation through eclectic to audio-lingual and gradually back to a safe, eclectic middle course. I am now convinced that the only thing which does not change is change itself. I am further convinced that awareness of change--of this state of constant flux--is going to have to be a guiding principle in the lives of you young prospective teachers. Adjustment to it must be the most important part of your preparation. Teaching your students to adjust and adapt may be the prime objective of your teaching career whatever your field of specialization, for the pace of change is accelerating year by year. Kenneth Boulding, a famous economist and social thinker, points out that in so far as scientific and technological progress is concerned the date that divides human history into two equal parts is well within living memory and that almost as much has happened since he was born as happened before. In Alvin Toffler's best-seller Future Shock he illustrates this accelerating life pace by dividing the last 50,000 years of man's existence into 800 lifetimes of approximately 62 years each. Of these 800 (1) 650 were spent in caves, (2) only during the last 70 has it been possible to communicate effectively from one lifetime to another (as writing made possible) and thus learn from past experience, (3) only during the last 6 lifetimes did masses of men see a printed word, (4) only during the last 4 lifetimes has it been possible to measure time with any precision, (5) only in the last 2 has anyone anywhere used an electric motor, (6) only in the last--the 800th -- has the overwhelming majority of all material goods we use daily been developed.

The change that we are talking about can be described as technological snowballing. Our major concern as educators will be the social and psychological

maladjustments that will result from it. It is these that you will have to cope with. We of the older generation are bewildered by it all since we feel that the things that we have tested and are familiar with are slowly and surely slipping away and at times we feel like shouting "Stop the world, I want to get off." I can only encourage you to start your teaching career using the best of what you have been taught, but start it with an open mind. Not just language teachers but all mankind will have to face the problems created by rapid change. Unfortunately, at the present, we can't really foresee its nature. Maybe a geneticist will breed a super-linguist. Medical science may be able to implant a device in a human being that will increase linguistic skills to undreamed of proficiency. While these might seem absurd now, let's keep in mind that serious scientists are predicting that developments which are just as far out are possible within the next 15 to 20 years.

What part will foreign language learning play in this world of rapid change? We know that language is relevant. Don't let anyone tell you that it isn't. Man is relevant and language is a coded transmission of man's thoughts and attitudes. My final message to you is that you stay alert and adaptable. We of my generation didn't always. We let the generation gap become an ocean; for you young people it's a brook. Keep it that way. You're better educated than my generation was. What you lack in experience you can make up in understanding your students' attitudes and their hangups. Keep growing, changing, and innovating. Become a professional educator and not just a trainer. For the aware, the adaptable, and the dedicated, there has never been a more exciting time to be entering the foreign language teaching profession. I envy you, and I wish you great fun and great satisfaction.

Eugene Savaiano, Chairman
Department of Romance Languages
Wichita State University
Wichita, Kansas 67208